

PostScript

LETTER

Tobacco use among Spanish physicians and medical students

Physicians play two fundamental roles in tobacco control: they act as advisers in informing patients about smoking risk, and they can be models of desired behaviour for their patients.¹⁻⁴ Physicians' smoking status can also influence advice to patients about tobacco smoking.²⁻⁵⁻⁷ This study assessed the prevalence of tobacco consumption in a sample of 106 Spanish physicians and 41 final year medical students, and the possible differences between them. The sample was collected in 2003, in several hospitals from seven Spanish cities. The survey response rate was 100% and none of the final completed questionnaires needed to be invalidated. All respondents completed a self-administered questionnaire that gathered information about sex, age, and professional status (physician or student), smoking status (smoker, former smoker, never smoker), and number of cigarettes per day.

Table 1 shows that 47.3% of respondents were current smokers. Including former smokers (20.6%), only 32.1% of the total sample had never smoked.

There were no differences in smoking prevalence between physicians and medical students, but there were significantly more non-smokers among students, as compared to physicians (odds ratio (OR) 3.79, 95% confidence interval (CI) 1.64 to 8.79), as well as fewer former smoker students (OR 4.60, 95% CI 1.30 to 16.32) than physicians. In addition, the average daily cigarette consumption was significantly higher among physicians (17.21) than students (9.47) (t test 3.857; p < 0.01).

These results suggest that the Spanish physician population does not differ from the Spanish general population, where smoking prevalence is 32.0% and the prevalence of ex-smokers is 14.8%.⁸

With respect to the differences between physicians and students, there were more smokers among physicians than students, and physician smokers showed a more persistent habit than did student smokers (17.21 (SD 6.5) cigarettes/day versus 9.47 (7.5)). We conclude that new generations of doctors show a lower consuming pattern of smoking than the former generations.

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Table 1 Sociodemographic variables and variables related to smoking habits

Variables	Total sample	Sample by professional status	
		Students	Physicians
Mean (SD) age (years)	34 (10.8)	21.5 (1.5)	39.1 (8.3)
Distribution	-	28.1%	71.9%
Age range (years)			
<30	39.7%	27.4%	12.3%
31-40	30.1%	0.7%	29.5%
41-50	23.3%	0%	23.3%
>50	6.8%	0%	6.8%
Smoking status			
Never smoker	32.1%	56.1%	21.1%
Former smoker	20.6%	7.3%	26.7%
Current smoker	47.3%	36.6%	52.2%
For smokers, mean (SD) daily cigarette consumption	15.34 (7.5)	9.47 (7.5)	17.21 (6.5)

The Lighter Side

